

Story 1974 (1992 Tape 4)

Narrator: Leyla Özdemir, 25

Location: Kırklareli, capital of Kırklareli Province (a Black Sea or Laz province)

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A Situation Too Deep for a Laz<sup>1</sup> to Understand

Some time ago there was a tourist making his first visit to the Black Sea area. In those days there were very few paved roads there, and so the stranger was driving his car along very carefully over dirt roads and sometimes over what were only donkey trails. He managed to drive safely between trees at some point in his journey, but when he came to a creek, he stopped, not knowing whether it was safe to proceed.

Looking around, he saw a native of that area sitting beneath a tree and playing upon a kemençe.<sup>2</sup> Walking over to that man, the stranger asked, "Sir, is this creek shallow or deep? My car is at the

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<sup>1</sup>The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, much like other people.

<sup>2</sup>A small, three-stringed violin played like a cello. The strings are often made of wire.

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edge of that creek, but I do not know whether or not it is safe for me to drive through the creek.'

The Laz stopped playing his kemençe and said, "Ya! Go ahead and drive across. The water is very shallow."

Relieved by this information, the stranger returned to his car and drove it into the creek. But he had gone only a few meters before the car sank in the water and was completely submerged. The stranger managed to swim to the bank, barely escaping with his life. He shouted at the Laz, "Brother, how could you lie to me and tell me that the water in this creek was shallow? My car is lost in the creek, and I was almost drowned."

The Laz again stopped playing his kemençe and said, "I am also very confused about what happened, and I am sorry about it. It was only a few minutes before you arrived that I saw a duck swim across that creek, and the water was then so shallow that it came only halfway up the duck's body. I don't understand how the volume of water could have increased so much in such a short time!"